

Testimony of Zoe Barnard, Program Coordinator at Montana Youth Homes, Helena
January 19, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Committee:

I have worked with children whose life has been touched by trauma and loss for six years. For the past two, I have had the privilege of working at Montana Youth Homes, Rocky Mountain Development Council. At Jan Shaw and Margaret Stuart Youth Homes, in Helena, we serve up to 16 youth ages 12 to 18 for time periods as short as two hours and as long as two years. Our mission is:

At Montana Youth Homes, youth experience relationships characterized by safety, protection, and care. Youth Support Staff create a home-like atmosphere in which we set healthy limits in a caring, structured community.

As the Program Coordinator at Montana Youth Homes, I have had the privilege of working with some of the most caring people I have ever met, people whose lifework is to make children whose history often includes trauma, abuse, poverty, and addiction feel safe and move forward with their lives. And I get to meet youth who are full of energy and hope.

The teenagers I meet are at a rough stage in their lives. Though teenagers, maybe especially these teenagers, are known for telling adults to go away, that they want to run their own lives, they really need us, all of us, the adults in their community. Here are some of the things they've written about us on their way out the door of Montana Youth Homes:

"It's a great environment to learn positive things."

About the staff: "Honesty, integrity, empathy, trustworthy, diligent workers."

"Thanks for all the help and support."

The staff made my stay a success by "encouraging me, believing in me, and getting me to my appointments. Thank you."

"I was helped with any and all of my needs."

I appreciated "the huge amount of respect [the staff] had for me. It was a first and it was nice."

"The staff was energetic, supportive, and caring."

"The love and support the staff gave me really helped me through my issues. They never gave up on me and I feel a strong attachment to them."

"[Jan Shaw] is my first real home."

I believe that Montana Youth Homes is an essential community program. I believe that its heart, the reason that we maintain two homes that feel like *homes*, is largely due to the people who work for the organization. I've brought some of the staff here today with me and I hope you'll listen as they tell you what motivates them to do what they do.

Thank you.